

## **OneAthens Transportation Implementation Team: Local Transit Needs**

This document is based upon the recommendations of the PPA Transportation Subcommittee and the Athens Transit System's Transit Development Plan (TDP). The OneAthens Transportation Implementation Team found that the PPA recommendations and the TDP are closely aligned. This is not too surprising, since the input of transit users was critical in crafting both documents.

Athens Transit currently operates 3 services:

- *The Bus*: fixed-route service with 17 routes and 28 accessible buses. Hours are from 6:00 am to 7:00 pm for all routes, continuing to 11:00 pm on selected routes Monday through Friday, and 7:30 am to 11:00 pm on Saturdays on selected routes. Adult fare is \$1.25 one way.
- *The Lift*: curb-to-curb paratransit service for people with mobility impairments, operating with 3 accessible vans, within 1 mile of fixed routes. Hours are from 6:00 am to 11:00 pm Monday through Friday and 7:00 am to 11:00 pm on Saturdays. Fare is \$2.50 one way.
- *The Link*: demand-response circulator service for the general public, operating with 2 accessible vans in rural areas of western and northeastern ACC. Hours are from 6:50 am to 10:05 am and from 4:05 pm to 6:20 pm (western route) and from 5:55 am to 8:45 am and 4:50 pm to 6:45 pm (northeastern route.) Fare is \$1.50 one way.

Funding for Athens Transit comes from a mix of federal, state, and local government sources as well as farebox revenues. Capital costs are generally split with federal sources covering 80%, state sources 10%, and local sources (SPLOST 2005) 10%. Operating costs are split between federal sources (15% in 2006), farebox revenues (41% in 2006) and the ACC general fund (44% in 2006). Georgia is one of only 9 states (and the only one of the 10 most populous states) that does not provide any operating funds for public transit.

### **Recommendations**

We have made an effort to estimate operating and capital costs associated with each of these recommendations. The operating costs include fuel, salary and benefits, service and maintenance of vehicles, and inflation. Also, note that SPLOST 2005 included \$1.8 million to serve as local match for transit vehicles. This will allow ATS to purchase 1 – 2 buses per year for the next 10 years. We assumed no costs to Athens-Clarke County for advocacy efforts.

## **Routes:**

1. Increase frequency of 2 fixed routes per year, until all routes operate at a minimum of once every 30 minutes. Note that increases in fixed route service include proportional increases in “The Lift” paratransit service and supporting staff.

### *Approximate cost to ACC*

- *Operating expenses:* \$250,000 for 2 routes per year, increasing by 4-6% annually for out years;
  - *Capital expenses:* \$120,000 (local match) from SPLOST funds for 2 routes in the first year (this is the 10% required local match; most of the capital cost is covered by federal and state funds); \$350,000 per bus (100% costs) for each route added in out years, above the two buses currently programmed annually.
  - *New revenue generated:* Income from fareboxes is estimated to cover 35% of the cost of increasing the frequency of routes.
2. Begin early morning service (starting at 5 am) and create Sunday and holiday service. Note that increases in fixed route service include proportional increases in “The Lift” paratransit service.

### *Approximate cost to ACC*

- *Operating expenses:* \$250,000 for the first year, increasing by 4-6% annually for out years.
  - *Capital expenses:* none, other than currently programmed capital maintenance.
  - *New revenue generated:* Income from fareboxes is estimated to cover 10-15% of the cost of increasing the hours of The Bus and The Lift; this percentage is expected to rise as riders become used to the new service.
3. Increase the operating hours of “The Link” to match those of fixed route service.

### *Approximate cost to ACC*

- *Operating expenses:* \$250,000 for first year, increase by 4-6% annually for out years.
- *Capital expenses:* none, if only two current vehicles are used, other than currently programmed capital maintenance.
- *New revenue generated:* Income from fareboxes is estimated to cover 10-15% of the cost of increasing the hours of The Link; this percentage is expected to rise as riders become used to the new service.

4. Increase the service area of “The Link” to county-wide.

### *Approximate cost to ACC*

- *Operating expenses:*
- *Capital expenses:* \$400,000 to add 4 vans in the first year, if ACC must pay the entire cost. ATS could apply for federal funds to cover 80% of the cost, and state funds to cover 10%, so if additional capital funding is approved the actual cost to ACC is likely to be \$40,000; vans are 5-year life cycle vehicles.
- *New revenue generated:* Income from fareboxes is estimated to cover 10-15% of the cost of increasing the routes of The Link in the first year; this percentage is expected to rise as riders become used to the new service.

## **Outreach:**

1. Develop and implement a Marketing and Public Awareness program with paid staff, targeted to help identified segments of the population. Specific outreach programs should include:
  - A. Develop a Community Outreach program that will work with employers, community groups, and service providers on discounted pass sales and teach staff “Travel Training/Trip Planning.”
  - B. Allow agencies like East Athens Development Corporation and Hancock Community Development Corporation to administer program to purchase and distribute discounted passes to clients with verified need.
  - C. Promotion of new routes and hours.

*Approximate cost to ACC*

- *Operating expenses:* \$75,000 annually (\$50,000 salary and benefits and \$25,000 in additional marketing expenses above current annual marketing budget of \$30,000)
- *Capital expenses:* none
- *New revenue generated:* Income from increased ridership

2. Explore outdoor advertising on buses, bus shelters, and trash receptacles at shelters as a source of revenue to cover the entire marketing budget and other operating expenses.

*Approximate cost to ACC*

- *Operating expenses:* none (included in Marketing & Public Awareness Program, above)
- *Capital expenses:* none (included in Marketing & Public Awareness Program, above)
- *New revenue generated:* Estimated \$75-100,000 annually.

**Advocacy:**

1. Continue to pursue additional and alternative funding sources at the local, state, and federal level for expansion of all transportation services.
2. Encourage local elected officials to discuss regional transportation options at the policy-maker level.
3. Encourage local elected officials and business leaders to lobby our federal delegation for increased federal operating funds for transit.
4. Form a transit advocacy organization, starting with an email alert system to mobilize transit supporters to lobby elected officials about transit issues.